Crampton----The X-Files Screenplay

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CRAMPTON

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ACT ONE

FADE IN:

SUPER: J. EDGAR HOOVER BLDG., WASHINGTON, DC

INT. FBI HEADQUARTERS

A MAN exits an elevator and walks through the halls of FBI headquarters. We never see his face, only glimpses of slicked-back blond hair and his clothes: a black suit, stiff white cuffs, white gloves, shiny black shoes--classic stage magician attire.

Though he walks without pretence of stealth, his passage seems completely undetected. The FBI agents that mill about the halls and offices do not notice him as he goes by, or their attention is drawn elsewhere just as he comes into view. Those in his path appear to step out of his way without even knowing it.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR

AGENT FOX MULDER and AGENT DANA SCULLY enter the elevator on another floor. They are in the middle of a conversation. Judging by the look on Scully's face, she's wishing it was over already.

MULDER
So, seriously, you never saw
Star Wars?

SCULLY
Nope.

MULDER
Never?

SCULLY
What did I just say?

MULDER
How could you not see Star Wars?

SCULLY
I was a little more into Grease at the time.

MULDER
Jeez, Scully, it's only like the most popular movie ever.

SCULLY
No, that's Titanic--which you never saw.

MULDER
Yeah, well, I know how it ends.

CUT TO:

INT. FBI HEADQUARTERS

The blond man enters a door marked "Criminal Division." At one of the half-dozen or so cubicles inside sits AGENT LARRY JOHNSON, studying a sheaf

of black-and-white photographs. The man strides to Agent Johnson's desk and reaches into his jacket.

BLOND MAN
(in a dead voice)
Larry Johnson?

AGENT JOHNSON
(looking up)
Yes?

Johnson's face goes ashen.

AGENT JOHNSON
How did you get in here?

JOHNSON'S POV: We get a very brief glimpse of the invading figure's face--handsome but bland, forgettable--before it is blocked by the BARREL OF A .44. The .44 EXPLODES--bang! bang!

The ROAR of gunfire breaks the spell. FBI agents turn toward the gunshots to see Agent Johnson slammed backwards, thrown out of his chair, knocking down the wall of his cubicle.

The AGENT nearest Agent Johnson leaps at the assassin, tackling him around the waist. The two men hit the ground with an alarming CLATTER.

The agent rises on his elbows.

AGENT
What the hell?

What previously was a man dressed in stage magician's clothes is now a BROKEN-UP PLASTER

MANNIKIN. The head has become detached from the body and is still SPINNING a few feet away.

CUT TO:

INT. FBI HEADQUARTERS, MINUTES LATER

Agents Mulder and Scully step off the elevator into chaos: FBI agents and EMS personnel are swarming around the fallen Larry Johnson.

MULDER
(to the nearest agents)
What's going on?

AGENT
You don't want to know.

ANOTHER AGENT
It was Johnson.

MULDER
Larry Johnson?

EMS personnel wheel a gurney past them--on it, the body of Larry Johnson.

SCULLY (O.S.)
Did you know him, Mulder?

Mulder looks at the mannikin parts strewn across the floor, and for a moment he hesitates, as if trying to remember something.

SCULLY (O.S.)
Mulder?

CLOSE UP on the mannikin's face.

CREDITS

INT. AUTOPSY ROOM, NEXT DAY

Mulder enters the swinging doors, holding a folded newspaper. Scully stands next to an operating table in scrubs. On the table is the body of Larry Johnson.

MULDER
Well, the Bureau's collective underwear is really up in a bunch on this one. The word from Skinner is that the Director wants hourly reports until this thing is cleaned up. You should see it, it's like a Fed convention around here. They've already come up with the "official" story.

He unfolds the newspaper, showing Scully the front page.

SCULLY
(reading)
"Assassin guns down FBI agent. Terrorism not ruled out." What terrorism?

MULDER
My sentiments exactly.

SCULLY
Actually, at this point it's probably as good an explanation as anything else.

MULDER
I take that to mean the autopsy has proved less than illuminating.

SCULLY
Agent Lawrence Johnson died at two-nineteen p.m. yesterday of a massive heart attack.

MULDER
Heart attack? Well, that explains it.

SCULLY
Explains what, exactly?

MULDER
How this could kill him.

Mulder holds up an evidence bag containing what appears to be the .44 used to shoot Agent Larry Johnson. He pulls the gun out, points it in the air, and pulls the trigger. Out of the barrel POPS a little flag with the word "Bang!" on it.

SCULLY
But weren't there gunshots?

MULDER
The agents on the scene seem to be having trouble remembering little details like that. What's more, the security cameras on that floor apparently began malfunctioning about the time

the, uh, terrorist entered the building. Started picking up television signals.

SCULLY
All of them?

Mulder shrugs.

MULDER
(pointing to Johnson's body)
So, what do we tell Skinner about this?

SCULLY
I'm not sure yet, but I think Larry Johnson saw the gun and believed he had been shot, and the shock killed him. He was, for lack of a better expression, tricked to death. It's not exactly common, but it has happened before.

She lifts the sheet off Johnson to show Mulder the body.

SCULLY
And then there's this...

Scully takes a penlight and, opening Johnson's eyelids with her fingers, shines it into Johnson's dead eyes. THE PUPILS SHRINK as the light hits them. Scully points the light away. The PUPILS EXPAND.

JOHNSON'S POV: Looking up from the table, we see Scully shine the light down again, then move it away.

MULDER
Ah. That.

SCULLY
Mulder, when we got to the scene of the shooting, or whatever it was, you clearly recognized Larry Johnson. Do you have some idea what this is all about?

MULDER
Meet me back in my office.

JOHNSON'S POV: Still looking up, we see Mulder walk out of view. Scully looks down at Johnson's body, then pulls the sheet back over him, covering the CAMERA.

INT. MULDER'S OFFICE

Mulder and Scully are watching a series of videotapes on a small television.

MULDER
About seven years ago, Johnson and his partner, Ricky Smith, were following a fraud case-- late-night infomercials for a psychic hotline.

On the TELEVISION SCREEN, gaudy red letters announce "The Mystery Line," along with an 800

number. The words dissolve into the image of a blandly handsome BLOND MAN, sitting at a desk next to a heavy black telephone.

BLOND MAN
(on the video)
What lottery numbers will make you rich? How can you make that someone special notice you? What is your purpose in life? When will you die? The Mystery Line has the answers to all your questions.

The man holds up the receiver and looks at the camera, appearing to almost stare through the screen.

BLOND MAN
(on the video)
Call now, if you really want to know.

Mulder hits eject and fishes for another tape, popping it into the VCR.

MULDER
I was with Violent Crimes at the time. Johnson and Smith called us in when they visited the homes of some of the Mystery Line's clients.

On the TELEVISION SCREEN, a hand-held camera documents the interior of an apartment. Several FBI agents stand over the body of a middle-aged woman, her dead eyes open and staring. Near her

open hand is a telephone receiver. In the background we can hear television STATIC.

MULDER
Eleven people, mostly in the Midwest, were found like this. No apparent cause of death. Television on. Phone off the hook--still connected to the Mystery Line. And check this out.

Mulder points to the television screen. An agent takes a penlight and inspects the dead woman's eyes. The PUPILS CONTRACT as the light hits them.

MULDER
Look familiar?

SCULLY
Larry Johnson. So, what was the deal with the Mystery Line?

MULDER
Johnson and Smith never made any headway. The phone number was traced back to an answering machine in an abandoned warehouse in Arizona. None of the victims were actually charged for the hotline's services, so there was no way to follow the money.

Mulder points to the television screen again.

MULDER
There. That's Ricky Smith.

On the SCREEN, a rotundish man with a neatly trimmed beard is giving orders. At one point he turns angrily toward the camera.

RICKY SMITH (ON THE VIDEOTAPE)
Get that thing out of my face!

MULDER
He had a reputation as an arrogant s.o.b., but he was actually a hell of an agent. Tenacious.He stops the tape.

SCULLY
So where is Ricky Smith now?

MULDER
Nobody knows. We were taken off the case when it was clear it was going nowhere. I heard Smith and Johnson had some kind of blow-up. Smith resigned not long after, and nobody has heard from him since.

Mulder takes a slip of paper out of an evidence bag and hands it to Scully.

MULDER
The man who shot Larry Johnson? This was found in his pocket.

It is a receipt slip, the old kind that requires a sheet of carbon paper underneath to make a merchant's copy. On it is stenciled the name of the merchant, which Scully reads out loud.

SCULLY
Illusions of Empire Magic Shop. Mulder, there isn't anything else on this.

MULDER
Check out the back.

Scully turns the receipt over. On the back in a neat but somehow antiquated hand is a map showing a few roads, but there are no names or compass directions. At one crossroads is a box labeled "Yellow House."

SCULLY
This doesn't tell us a whole lot, Mulder.

MULDER
Well, it's all we've got to work with right now. Skinner wants this wrapped up a-sap-- an FBI agent getting gunned down at his desk doesn't look too good on recruiting day.

SUPER: ILLUSIONS OF EMPIRE, EMPIRE, MICHIGAN

INT. MAGIC SHOP

Illusions of Empire is a dank little shop that looks and smells like an old basement. Shelves bow

under the weight of boxes with labels like "Glass Box Penetration," "Smashed Watch Gimmick," "Nest o' Balls," and "Bloody Needle Gag."

One wall of the shop is devoted entirely to ventriloquist dummies. Mulder takes one down--the label reads "My name is Laffo!"--and clumsily manipulates the mouth.

MULDER
(mumbling through clenched teeth)
Hi there, kids! Hi there, kids!

DUMMY'S POV: CLOSE UP on Mulder's face, his comic smile. The dummy's head turns, showing Scully looking at Mulder the way a mother looks at a misbehaving child. Mulder puts "Laffo" back on his shelf.

Illusion of Empire's SHOPKEEP is standing behind the counter. He looks like some small-time hustler out of an old gangster movie: greasy hair, thin mustache, smoking an unfiltered cigarette down to a nub with another one behind his ear.

SHOPKEEP
How can I help you folks today?

MULDER
(flashing his i.d.)
We'd like to ask you about a purchase that was made here.

SHOPKEEP

Sure, Officer...
(he squints at Mulder's i.d.)
... Muldoon.

MULDER
Mulder.

Scully hands him the receipt.

SCULLY
We'd like to know who made this purchase and what they bought.

The shopkeep looks at the blank receipt, then back up at the agents with a suspicious smile.

SHOPKEEP
You're kidding, right? There ain't nothing on this. Don't look like they bought anything.

SCULLY
All the same...

SHOPKEEP
Well, I guess I could check the back. I keep copies of my receipts for taxes. Don't want to get in trouble with the Feds, right?

The shopkeep winks, jots down the receipt number and disappears into the back. Mulder, meanwhile, is goofing around with a miniature guillotine. He sticks his index finger through the slicing hole

and SLAMS the plunger down, sending the small but obviously sharp blade toward his finger. It appears to pass right through. Mulder wiggles his finger and smiles.

MULDER
Pretty cool, eh?

SCULLY
Yep, pretty cool.

The shopkeep emerges from the back with another slip of paper.

SHOPKEEP
This must be your lucky day. I found your receipt. I'd say it's about four years old.

He shows the merchant's copy of the receipt to the agents.

SHOPKEEP
Looks like they bought a gag gun. You know, the kind where you pull the trigger and a little flag pops out, "Bang!"

Mulder takes the receipt. On it, above the words "Gag Gun, one," in the same oddly ancient script as the map, is an address.

SCULLY
Why didn't this address show up on our receipt?

SHOPKEEP

Did you try this?

He takes the original receipt from Scully. Producing a lighter from his shirt pocket, the shopkeep places its flame near the paper. Brown lettering fades into view: the address, 222 Main Street, Crampton, Ohio; the words "Gag Gun, one;" and, at the bottom, "If you really want to know." At this, the agents exchange a look.

SHOPKEEP
Invisible ink. Hokey as it gets.

SCULLY
That doesn't make sense. Forensics tested the paper for chemicals. They would have found traces of the ink.

The shopkeep lights another cigarette.

SHOPKEEP
That's why they call it magic, toots.

The shopkeep starts to hand the original receipt back to the agents, then notices the map on the back, with the words "Yellow House." A broadly cunning look develops on his face.

SHOPKEEP
Yellow house, huh?

MULDER
What? Does this mean something to you?

SHOPKEEP
It's probably nothing, but there's this saying among magicians. Not all of them, just certain magicians. The ones that are a little kooky, if you know what I mean.

SCULLY
What kind of saying?

SHOPKEEP
"I never want to live in a yellow house."

MULDER
What does it mean?

He takes a long drag off his cigarette, blowing the smoke out his nose.

SHOPKEEP
Dunno. I'm not that kind of magician.

Mulder and Scully take back the receipt and head for the exit. At the door, Mulder is practically knocked over by a CLOWN, its face made up into a smile of torturous proportions. The clown mimes brushing itself off before heading into the shop. Mulder is visibly shaken.

SCULLY
You're not one of those people who's scared of clowns, are you?

Inside the shop, the clown turns towards Mulder and Scully. Slowly and very deliberately, it jams a finger way up into one of its clown nostrils. It is almost an obscene gesture.

MULDER
I am now.

CUT TO:

SUPER: RURAL ROUTE 7, OHIO

INT. CAR

Route 7 traverses a particularly flat and featureless section of Ohio--a pretty flat and featureless state to begin with. Mulder and Scully pass mile after mile of cornfields, mom-and-pop gas stations, and sun-blistered farmhouses.

MULDER
I don't know about you, Scully, but I've got a funny feeling. Like I've been down this road before.

Scully looks out the window. There doesn't appear to be anything about this region that would jog anyone's memory of anything.

SCULLY
Well, numerous forms of déjà vu-type experiences have been documented. Some are related to states of epilepsy or psychopathology. One of the more common varieties is

paramnesia--a split-second disordering of the short-term memory. Sort of a mental hiccup. Another form--

MULDER
(interrupting)
I don't think it's déjà vu, Scully. It's more like ... like something I already know rather than something I've already experienced. It's very hard to put into words.

SCULLY
(pointing ahead)
Mulder, do you see that?

Mulder's eyes follow Scully's finger. With the flatness of the land, they can see miles in the distance. Ahead, apparently on this same road, is a house.

MULDER
It's a house.

SCULLY
It's a yellow house.

MULDER
Our yellow house?

Scully checks the map on the back of the magic shop receipt.

SCULLY

It's hard to tell from this,
but it could be.

Scully looks up at the yellow house again. Heat waves coming off the asphalt of Route 7 distort the view, making it appear watery.

SCULLY
(squinting to make out the house)
Mulder, shouldn't we be getting closer?

MULDER
(also squinting)
Aren't we?

Despite the fact that they are doing ten over the speed limit, they don't seem to have closed the gap at all.

SCULLY
I don't think so.

As they talk, their car passes through a copse of trees--a rarity in this barren area--and for a moment, the house is out of their view. When they emerge from the trees, the yellow house is right on top of them. Mulder slams on the brakes. The car comes to a SKIDDING stop in front of the yellow house.

MULDER
(catching his breath)
That was interesting.

EXT. YELLOW HOUSE - DAY

The yellow house is small, but from the outside appears well maintained. The front porch is painted white, with flowery accents. Under the front door is a fancy welcome mat.

Mulder and Scully KNOCK on the door. There is no answer. Mulder tries the handle: it is unlocked.

MULDER
Ah, one of those neighborhoods.

INT. YELLOW HOUSE

They enter. The inside of the yellow house is as uninviting as the exterior is welcoming: dark, musty, and overwhelmingly claustrophobic, it looks more like a nest than a home.

MULDER
Hello?

Mulder nearly trips over a bunch of tin cans that are stacked near the front door. He holds a can up for Scully to see. Its label reads, "POTTED MEAT."

SCULLY
Yummy.

From deeper within the yellow house comes the unmistakable sound of a shotgun RACKING. Mulder and Scully spin to face the sound, their guns drawn.

Standing in the narrow hallway, holding a shotgun in shaky hands, is a rotundish MAN with a bushy, unkempt beard and wild, feral eyes. He has the

crazed look of someone who hasn't slept in a long, long time.

SCULLY
FBI! Drop it!

The bearded man complies, though more out of fatigue than obedience. He looks at Mulder.

BEARDED MAN
Ah, Agent Mulder.

MULDER
(shocked)
Ricky Smith?

RICKY SMITH nods. Wasted and apparently exhausted, he bears little resemblance to the "arrogant s.o.b." from the crime-scene videos.

MULDER
What happened to you?

RICKY SMITH
You don't really want to know.

He drops into a chair.

RICKY SMITH
What brings you out here, to the middle of nowhere?

SCULLY
It's Larry Johnson. He's dead.

RICKY SMITH
(with a wry smile)

Lucky bastard.

FADE OUT

END OF ACT ONE

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ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. YELLOW HOUSE KITCHEN

Mulder, Scully, and Ricky stand around the yellow house's squalid little kitchen. Mulder and Scully have brought Ricky up to date on their investigation of Johnson's murder, and they are now hitting him with a barrage of questions.

SCULLY
Are you sure there's nothing you can tell us that might help us out? Something about the Mystery Line case, maybe?

RICKY SMITH
I'm sorry, Agent Scully. It was a long time ago.

SCULLY
Had you spoken with Johnson recently?

RICKY SMITH
My relationship with the Bureau ended six years ago.

MULDER
I heard that it ended on something of a sour note. Some kind of falling-out between you and Johnson?

RICKY SMITH
We just had trouble seeing things the same way. We'd been partners for a long time. It happens. You'll see.

MULDER
So how did you end up here? "The middle of nowhere"--your words.

RICKY SMITH
I like it out here, in the heartland. Once you live here you never want to live anywhere else. It's real.

MULDER
Compared to what?

From the way they look at the filthy house, the tins of potted meat, it's obvious Mulder and Scully aren't buying it. Ricky sees it, too. In an attempt to change the subject, he opens a drawer and pulls out a pack of playing cards.

RICKY SMITH
Do you like card tricks, Agent Scully? I don't care for them myself, but some people do seem to enjoy such things. Magic. Illusion. Smarmy little creeps in tuxedoes. All that nonsense.

Ricky shuffles the cards, fanning the deck face-down.

RICKY SMITH
Please take a card, Agent Mulder.

Mulder draws the Eight of Spades. He then slips it back into the deck. Ricky mixes the pack again, using a rather theatrical one-handed shuffle. He fans the cards face-up. Mulder checks the deck.

MULDER
No Eight of Spades.

RICKY SMITH
It's in your partner's hand.

Scully, whose hands have been in her coat pocket the whole time, removes them. In her left palm she is cupping the Eight of Spades.

SCULLY
(to Mulder)
You put the card in my pocket.

MULDER
I did not. I know better than to reach into a woman's pockets, Scully. It must have been there before.

RICKY SMITH
In magic, like in everything else, the logical explanation is almost always the right one. Almost.

Ricky pulls a folded piece of paper out of his pocket.

RICKY SMITH
This came through my mail slot
a few hours ago.

He unfolds it and hands it to Scully. She reads the words, written in that now-familiar script, out loud.

SCULLY
"She is holding the Eight of
Spades."

MULDER
Any idea who sent it?

RICKY SMITH
That's a question I'm afraid I
can't answer.

SCULLY
Can't? Or won't?

RICKY SMITH
Bit of both, I suppose.

Mulder produces the magic shop receipt.

MULDER
You could say this came
through our mail slot too. It
was found on the, uh, man who
killed Agent Johnson.

RICKY SMITH
(reading the receipt)
"If you really want to know."
Now, where have I heard that

before?

He hands the receipt back to Mulder.

RICKY SMITH
222 Main Street is a fix-it shop run by a guy named Fred something. It's closed most of the time, like just about everything in that crummy little town. But you might get lucky. Personally, I think you should forget the whole thing and head back to Cincinnati before it gets too late.

MULDER
(a little frustrated)
Ricky, we're not on a social call here. An FBI agent is dead, killed right in the middle of the J. Edgar friggin Hoover Building, and the Director has taken it a little personally. Once upon a time you might have been able to label this thing "unsolved" and let it go at that, but that's not really an option for us now.

RICKY SMITH
I'll tell you what: go check out your address. If you really want to stick around

Crampton, you're welcome to stay here.

Mulder and Scully look at each other. Given the general squalor of the yellow house, Ricky's offer is not an appealing one.

RICKY SMITH
Or, if you want, there's a cheap little motel in town. You go there, have a look around. If you still want to talk to me, we can talk tomorrow. It's not like I'm going anywhere.

MULDER
(pulling out a notebook and pen)
What's your phone number?

RICKY SMITH
Don't have a phone number. Don't have a phone.

SCULLY
You don't have a telephone?

RICKY SMITH
Nope.

Mulder hands Ricky his cell phone.

MULDER
I want you to take this, then. Scully's cell phone number is star-six. Call us if you

remember anything you think we
ought to know.

SUPER: MAIN STREET, CRAMPTON, OHIO

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

"Crummy little town" does not even begin to describe this desolate burg. Though Mulder and Scully's drive down Crampton's Main Street takes them past a number of buildings, most appear to be abandoned. There seem to be only three active businesses: the "Fix-It and Supply" shop, the Oasis Motel that Ricky mentioned, and a diner apparently called "EAT HERE."

INT. OASIS MOTEL

Mulder and Scully enter the office of the Oasis Motel, their overnight bags over their shoulders. Mulder RINGS the service bell. Also in the office is an older COUPLE. Judging by their colorfully patterned clothes, sunglasses, and cameras, they are tourists.

TOURIST WOMAN
(in a British accent)
Excuse me, could we take your
picture?

SCULLY
I'm sorry?

TOURIST WOMAN
My husband and I are on a
photographic excursion, and
we'd like to take a picture of

you and your husband. It would
go so well with the others.

Mulder puts his arm around Scully's shoulders.

MULDER
Why, certainly!

SCULLY
(shrugging Mulder's arm off)
We're not married.

Too late: the woman's camera FLASHES, and the picture is taken. As the tourist couple leaves, the MANAGER appears from a back room.

MANAGER
Good afternoon. Have you
stayed with us before?

Scully begins filling out the necessary forms, while Mulder surveys the small office. A cigarette machine, the kind with the pull-knobs. Two faux-leather chairs, cracked by heat and sunlight. A gumball dispenser, with a small sign saying the proceeds benefit the local Knights of Columbus.

On a small table is a stack of leaflets. Mulder reads one, then takes it over to Scully. "Spectacular Display of Illusion and Ventriloquism," it promises, to be held at three o'clock the next day at the Masonic Hall.

SCULLY
Mulder, I think I've seen
enough magic tricks for one
day.

MULDER
Look at this, Scully.

Mulder points to the bottom of the advertisement: "Sponsored by Illusions of Empire."

MANAGER
Ah, yes. Our little magic show. You don't want to miss that. It's the only show in town, so to speak.

He hands them two keys.

MANAGER
If there's anything you need, please don't hesitate to ask me. I'm always at the disposal of my guests.

EXT. MAIN STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

Mulder stands on the sidewalk in front of the "Fix-It and Supply Shop." Scully is some distance behind him, talking on her cell-phone. There is a sign on the shop's door: "BACK AT SEVEN."

Scully ends her phone call and walks over to Mulder.

SCULLY
That was Skinner. They're not having any luck on their end. On top of that, the terrorist cover story seems to have backfired: an official at the Syrian embassy in Washington

was assassinated about two hours ago, and the Syrians are calling it an "act of retribution" on the part of the United States.

MULDER
Retribution for what? Oh, no-- Johnson's murder?

SCULLY
Exactly. And since it's too late to retract the terrorist story, they're just going to have to ride it out.

MULDER
Washington must be a real madhouse. For the first time today, I'm glad we're in Crampton.

SCULLY
Speaking of which, what's the story with the Fix-It Shop?

MULDER
(checking his watch)
We've got about a half hour before Fred's due back. Let's have a look at the hall where this magic show is supposed to be held.

They cross the street and walk the half-block to the Masonic Hall. From the outside, it looks like every other ruined, abandoned building along Main

Street, except for the rather cryptic Masonic symbols adorning its face, which Mulder stands contemplating for some moments.

SCULLY
Don't tell me you've never seen a Masonic Hall before.

MULDER
You know, Scully, there are thousands of these things in cities all over the world, but the origins of Freemasonry itself are all but unknown. In the prehistoric period they were one of the first secret societies--possibly the first cult. Some scholars trace the beginnings of the Freemasons to the Egyptian god Thoth, the god of wisdom and learning who's thought of as a source of the earliest writings that attempt to illuminate the mysteries of existence. Thoth is also considered by some to be the first sorcerer or magician, and by others--

SCULLY
(interrupting at the word "magician")
Hold it. Are you trying to tell me that this is some kind of conspiracy involving the Freemasons?

MULDER
Jeez, Scully, when you say it like that, you make it sound ... kinda stupid.

Scully tries the hall's main door. It is unlocked. She pushes it open and the agents look inside. Pitch black.

MULDER
Looks like a flashlight job.

SCULLY
Great.

INT. MASONIC HALL

For a second, everything is black. Then a flashlight beam slices through the darkness.

Even by flashlight, the agents can see the Masonic Hall is a total disaster: broken chairs and debris litter the floor, dust and filth has accumulated in piles in the corners. There is a stage, the wooden planks of which don't look like they can support a person's weight. Still hanging across the stage is a curtain, obviously once quite ornate but now in tatters.

SCULLY
I don't know about you, but I don't think there's going to be a magic show here tomorrow.

MULDER
That's okay--I really hate matinees, anyway.

The beam of the flashlight flickers and goes out. They are plunged into complete blackness.

MULDER
Scully, I think I'm having déjà vu all over again. Scully?

SCULLY
I think I'm having it, too. Not déjà vu exactly. It's like you said: not something you've already done, but something you already know.

There is a CRACK, not unlike that of a hand smacking a flashlight. The beam blazes back to life.

MULDER
(pointing the flashlight)
Is that an office back there?

INT. MASONIC HALL OFFICE

The agents enter the tiny office, the beam of the flashlight roaming around the room. It stops on a desk, apparently the only piece of furniture in the whole building. On it sits a heavy black phone.

SCULLY
Mulder, does this look familiar at all?

MULDER
The Mystery Line commercial.

Mulder goes over to the desk. He hesitates a moment, then picks up the telephone receiver. He starts to bring it to his ear...

SCULLY
Uh, Mulder?

Mulder shines the flashlight towards Scully's voice. She is holding up the end of the telephone cord. It is frayed, wires dangling, as though it were torn from the wall. Mulder, a little embarrassed, sets the receiver back in its cradle.

EXT. MAIN STREET - EVENING

Mulder and Scully exit the ruined hall, overcoats dusty, hair full of cobwebs. Scully dusts herself off.

SCULLY
When we get back to the motel,
I'm going to take a long
shower.

MULDER
Looks like Fred's back.

Across the street, the Fix-It and Supply Shop's sign has been turned around to read "OPEN FOR BUSINESS." Inside, a figure can be seen working. Mulder begins crossing the street. Scully stands there, pulling long, dusty knots of cobweb out of her hair.

MULDER
Coming?

SCULLY
Sure. Why not.

INT. FIX-IT SHOP

A small bell RINGS as Mulder and Scully enter the Fix-It shop. The shopowner, FRED, does not look up. Wearing overalls and a pair of glasses, one lens of which has been fitted with an eyepiece for working on minute mechanisms, he is hunched over some obscure device, working at it with tiny tools.

SCULLY
Excuse me?

Fred still does not acknowledge them.

SCULLY
Excuse me, I'm Agent Scully. This is Agent Mulder. We're with the FBI.

FRED
(concentrating on his gizmo)
I heard about you.

Fred goes back to ignoring the agents. Scully, looking around the shop, notices a sheet of paper on the counter. She holds it up for Mulder to see: "Spectacular Display of Illusion and Ventriloquism."

MULDER
Sir, we're here on an investigation.

He holds up the receipt from Illusions of Empire.

MULDER
Maybe you could tell us how
your shop's address turned up
on this receipt.

With a sigh full of irritation, Fred finally gets up from his workbench to examine the receipt.

FRED
(reading slowly)
"Illusions ... of ... Empire."
Magic shop? I've never been
too interested in magic.

Fred squints, reading through the magnifying eyepiece.

FRED
Why, that ain't even my
handwriting. Sorry, can't help
you.

MULDER
Sir, I understand you're
probably a very busy man, but
this is kind of a serious
matter.

Outside, an old van--the kind with no windows along its sides--pulls in front of the shop.

FRED
Listen, agent whoever you are.
I don't belong to any militia
and I ain't never done

anything illegal, least not
that I know of. I'm just
trying to run a business here.
I take whatever jobs come my
way--mostly piecework.

Fred holds up his gizmo as an example. Even up close, the thing offers no clue as to what it is or what it does.

FRED
I usually don't know what the
whole machine looks like, and
to tell you the truth I don't
much care. Now, however
serious it might seem, this
business that brought you here
... well, offhand I'd say
someone is having some fun at
your expense.

Mulder looks to his partner for some help, but the look on Scully's face says she's thinking the same thing as Fred.

Outside, a teenage KID pops out of the passenger door of the van and enters the Fix-It shop. Fred puts down his gizmo.

FRED
Excuse me, but I have a real
customer.

Fred waves the kid over the the far end of the desk, away from the agents. He retrieves something from a shelf, a package of some sort wrapped in black paper and held together with leather straps.

Fred and the kid turn their shoulders to Mulder and Scully and speak in WHISPERS so they cannot overhear. Fred seems to be giving the kid some kind of instructions: he grasps his left hand with the thumb and forefinger of his right, creating the image of a handcuff or shackle of some kind. He then moves both hands as if pulling a length of rope, letting it go slack and pulling it taut again. The kid nods. Finally, the kid exits the shop with his package under his arm and gets in the van, which drives away.

MULDER
We'd like to ask you a couple more questions.

FRED
No. No, sir, I'm closing up for the night. I'm going to have to ask you to leave.

MULDER
I'm sure it will just take a few minutes of your time.

FRED
I'll tell you what. It's past my dinner time. If you really want to talk that bad, we can talk over at the diner.

He takes a ratty coat off a hook.

FRED
I got to go out the back to turn the lights out. I'll meet

you out front and we can walk
there together.

EXT. MAIN STREET - EVENING

Mulder and Scully exit through the front door; inside, they see Fred hit a series of light switches, then open a back door and step out.

Mulder and Scully wait a few moments. No sign of Fred. The agents walk to the back of the building.

EXT. BACK OF FIX-IT SHOP - EVENING

The rear of the fix-it shop is a blank brick wall, bearing a few stains and patches of crumbling mortar. There is no back door.

SCULLY
Wonderful.

INT. "EAT HERE" DINER

Treacly MUZAK plays to empty tables. As with seemingly every building in Crampton, the diner displays an advertisement for the "spectacular" magic show tomorrow at three, this one taped to the front window.

Mulder and Scully enter and take seats at the counter.

MULDER
(in a tired voice)
Okay, Scully, so what do we
have so far?

SCULLY
(also tired)
So far? Nothing I'd care to bring back to Skinner. Unless you want to haul Ricky Smith to Washington to do card tricks for the director. It's as though none of this has anything to do with Agent Johnson's murder anymore. It's all changed. I feel like we're on some kind of weird scavenger hunt.

Scully seems on the brink of something, but can't quite articulate it.

SCULLY
It's almost like all this is just an excuse to to ... something. I don't know, maybe--

COUNTERGIRL
(appearing suddenly and interrupting Scully)
Good evening, folks! Would you like to try the meatloaf tonight?

Mulder and Scully look up sharply, Scully's train of thought lost. The COUNTERGIRL is tall and very attractive, but wearing too much makeup, giving her face a waxy appearance.

MULDER

Uh ... yeah, sure. And a Coke, please.

COUNTERGIRL
And for you, ma'am?

Scully is a little out of it, still trying to hold onto her last thought ... to no avail.

SCULLY
Just some coffee for me, thanks.

MULDER
Can I ask you something? How do you--the town, I mean--stay in business? It doesn't seem like there's enough people around here to support it.

COUNTERGIRL
Oh, tourists, mostly.

SCULLY
Tourists?

COUNTERGIRL
Oh, sure. We get lots of people like you passing through here.

The countergirl nods in the direction of a table toward the back. There, the couple on a "photographic excursion" is seated. They are scooping chunks of meatloaf and lumps of mashed potatoes into their mouths, seemingly not pausing

between bites to swallow. They turn to Mulder and Scully and smile, their chins dripping gravy.

MULDER
You know, on second thought...

He stops as Scully's cell phone rings. She answers it.

SCULLY
Scully.

RICKY SMITH
(on Mulder's cell phone in the yellow house)
Where have you been? I've been ringing you for an hour! Are you two still in Crampton?

SCULLY
Yes.

RICKY SMITH
Get out. Get out while you still can.

SCULLY
What do you--

Ricky hangs up.

SCULLY
Mulder, that was Ricky. I think something's wrong.

MULDER
Let's go.

The agents take their coats and leave. A few seconds after they've gone, the tourists stand and leave, their meal only partially eaten. The countergirl clears their plates and goes through a swinging door, presumably to the back of the building. The diner is once again empty. After a moment, the LIGHTS GO OUT.

FADE OUT

END OF ACT TWO

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ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. YELLOW HOUSE

Mulder, Scully, and Ricky are together in the yellow house. Whereas before he was low-key and a little evasive, Ricky now is agitated. He unfolds a sheet of paper and holds it up for them to see: "Spectacular Display of Illusion and Ventriloquism."

RICKY SMITH
This came through my mail slot about an hour ago. Have you seen this?

SCULLY
Yes. They're pretty much all over town.

RICKY SMITH
This is bad. This is very bad. You definitely don't want to be around if--when--this thing happens.

MULDER
We checked out the Masonic Hall. I don't see any spectacular displays happening in that place. Not tomorrow, not next week, probably not ever.

RICKY SMITH
Agent Mulder, I'm guessing you've been in Crampton long enough to know that what you see has very little to do with what you get. And you don't want to be there when they give it to you.

SCULLY
The Mystery Line. So you did continue the investigation on your own.

RICKY SMITH
(nodding)
I couldn't let it go. Cases like that were my special interest. Being able to point my finger and say, with all the authority of the Justice Department behind me, "Look, this is all a fake, none of this is real, it's all a con." Those opportunities somehow justified all my work, maybe my whole life. When we looked into the Mystery Line, Larry and I, we could tell it was a front for something, but none of the pieces seemed to fit together ... or, they fit together, but the picture they made was all wrong. Larry said "no more"--too many dead ends, too many coincidences. But I

was already in too deep. I quit the Bureau. I made the Mystery Line my purpose in life. That's when I was brought to Crampton.

MULDER
What do you mean, "brought"?

RICKY SMITH
The same way they used Larry's murder to bring you to Crampton. One thing just sort of leads to another. A map, a murder, a phone call, a message in a fortune cookie. They've got all the gimmicks. They're very good at getting you to do what they want. As I drove toward the town I knew that I'd been here before. I knew it. Here, or someplace very much like it. There's more than one Crampton in the world, that I'm sure of. Anyway, I snooped around for while, like you did. And then I went to that old ruin of a hall. But I wasn't alone there. I didn't exactly see anyone or anything, but I could feel something lurking around me, running away when I wasn't looking. Leading me, it seemed, from room to room. I came across a tiny office with

a desk and a phone. The phone was disconnected, I could see that. I don't know what made me pick up the receiver and put it to my ear.

Mulder and Scully exchange a brief look.

RICKY SMITH
When I did I heard ... something. A voice. Or maybe more than one voice. Telling me things that didn't make any sense, not in any literal way. But it scared me. And in those days nothing scared me. I slammed down the receiver fast. I should have gotten out of there right then, and I probably still could have. But I let it lead me on further and further into this darkness that seemed to be massing around me. Finally I was standing on the stage of the hall, right where the curtain comes together. Even at that point, I think I could have turned and walked away without any serious consequences. But I had to look behind the curtain. I had to know what was hiding there in all that blackness. I had to know. And the strangest thing was

finding out that I already knew.

Ricky stops, but it's clear he wants to say more. He just needs to have it dragged out of him.

MULDER
What was it? What did you know?

RICKY SMITH
It's very hard to put into words. I think you, of all people, should be able to understand that, Agent Mulder. But what I felt, looking into that blackness behind the curtain ... it seemed that I could hear the blackness, that I could touch it.

Ricky is building steam, his narrative fueled by some reservoir of manic energy. He speaks faster, waving his hands.

RICKY SMITH
I understood that there was something at work at the heart of things--no, not something at work, but something at play. Something that was playing, putting on a show--a flimsy, pointless, hokey stageshow. And I realized then that the only thing that kept

the show going was this mindless, relentless urge...

SCULLY
Urge for what?

RICKY SMITH
For more play. Just to play and play and play. Pure play for the hell of it. Pure magic. And pure illusion. I don't have any names to give you. I wish I did. That always makes it easier to take. I could say it's the Bavarian Illuminati or the Council on Foreign Relations or the Prince of Darkness, but I'd be kidding myself, picking a name out of a hat for the sake of having something to call them. From our point of view their power is unthinkable, literally. Our brains just aren't wired to handle it. That's what killed those people. They called the Mystery Line to get the truth. And they got it.

MULDER
So what is the truth, Ricky?

RICKY SMITH
The truth is, there is no truth. Everything is mutable.

Provisional. They can change the entire landscape of things--make things happen that couldn't possibly happen. Or even undo something that's already happened. Not just here, in Crampton, but anywhere, everywhere they can find an audience. Build a stage. Put on the act. We don't get to see the big picture--and sometimes it's very big indeed. Worldwide repercussions. That sort of thing. But in the end it all gets swept under the table--we blame it on some nut in a shack, or terrorists.

Mulder and Scully look at each other uncomfortably at the word "terrorists."

RICKY SMITH

With so much power, though, there's really nothing for them to do except play. Push a button, pull a string, just to see what moves on the other end. That's what the truth is, Agent Mulder. Once I knew that, once I knew their secret ... well, here I am. And I'm not going anywhere. When you know how it's all done, when you know the secret--it's all over.

And so is Ricky's story. The manic energy that fueled its telling apparently spent, he slouches in his chair.

RICKY SMITH
I really hope for your sake that they don't let you in on it. I really mean that. They're always looking for superior playmates, and you two would seem to fit the bill. But if you don't get out of Crampton before this magic show...

SCULLY
Well, what about you? You're welcome to come with us when we go.

RICKY SMITH
(with a humorless smile)
There's nowhere to go, not for me, at least. Besides--

He turns the magic show flyer over. On the back, written in neat, ancient letters: "Admit One."

RICKY SMITH
--my ticket's already paid for.

Ricky looks at his watch.

RICKY SMITH
(forcing an animated tone)

Hey, it's getting late. If you two are going to make Cincinnati tonight, you'd better hit the road now.

EXT. YELLOW HOUSE - NIGHT

Mulder and Scully get into their car. In the doorway, Ricky watches. For a second, a look crosses his face. Hope, perhaps. Then the look is gone, replaced by one of weary resignation. As Mulder and Scully drive away, Ricky closes the door.

INT. CAR

Mulder and Scully.

MULDER
Well, Scully, what do you think of that?

SCULLY
I think I'm ready to upgrade my diagnosis from delusional to full-blown paranoia.

MULDER
I'm not sure I agree, Scully. Sure, Ricky's story is out there, but the basic idea that things aren't what they seem is pretty much the rationale followed by all serious investigators--be they scientists, philosophers, even FBI agents. The only thing

that distinguishes Ricky's perspective is his conviction that there's some sort of design or intent behind the facts as we know them. But it's all the same thing--it's just a matter of scale.

By the look on her face, it is clear Scully is unconvinced.

MULDER
Look, all we know, all we can ever know, is based on what we can see, what we can touch, right? But it's not real. Our senses simply collect this information and then our brains compose it into some mock-up of reality.

SCULLY
Mulder, is this little speech going somewhere?

MULDER
What if you could know things as they really are? Not just as they're processed by our senses and assembled in our brains, but as the world really looks? I think Ricky Smith, when he came to this town, got a look at things as they really are. And I don't think he liked what he saw.

SCULLY
Then why doesn't he just leave? You don't really believe he likes it there in that house, do you?

MULDER
I don't think he has a choice. The filth. The potted meat. I think something's been keeping him there. Feeding him. Keeping him alive. Why, I don't know.

EXT. OASIS MOTEL - NIGHT

The agents' car pulls into the parking lot.

INT. SCULLY'S MOTEL ROOM

From the amount of steam in the room and the sound of RUNNING WATER, it looks like Scully is finally taking that shower. The phone starts to RING; it is an ancient Princess model with a ring like a fire alarm. At the third RING there is a muffled CURSE from inside the bathroom. The WATER stops.

CUT TO:

INT. MULDER'S MOTEL ROOM

Mulder is lounging on the bed flipping through TV channels. Through the thin wall, the RING of Scully's phone can be barely heard. Mulder doesn't seem to notice.

Click: An old black-and-white cartoon.

Click: Some artsy-looking thing, shot in negative exposure and accompanied by AIRY SYNTH MUSIC.

Click: STATIC, with a hint of a human image behind.

Click: Another old cartoon.

CUT TO:

INT. SCULLY'S MOTEL ROOM

After two more RINGS, Scully comes out of the bathroom wrapped in a long bathrobe, her hair in a towel.

Scully's POV: She is trying to get to the phone, but the mist seems to have thickened, and she can't quite seem to cover the eight or so steps to the RINGING telephone. She keeps getting set back.

Suddenly she finds herself with the telephone in her hand, held up to her ear. She looks surprised.

SCULLY
Hello?

There are vague NOISES on the other end of the line, but no reply.

SCULLY
Hello?

The NOISES seem to coalesce into something like a human VOICE, or SEVERAL VOICES not quite in synch. They are speaking in what might be another language, not making any sense. The speech is full

of hisses and grunts. Still, Scully seems mesmerized for a moment. Then the spell breaks, and she SLAMS the phone down.

CUT TO:

INT. MULDER'S MOTEL ROOM

Mulder is still surfing through TV channels.

Click: An infomercial for a set of encyclopedias called "The Lure of the Unknown."

VOICEOVER (ON THE TELEVISION)
Do you really want to know the truth about Bigfoot? The Lost City of Atlantis? Flying saucers? "The Lure of the Unknown" has the answers.

On the SCREEN, the picture changes: A thin BLOND MAN appears. The poor reception makes him look gruesome, cadaverous. He looks right into the camera, almost looking through the television.

BLOND MAN
(in the same voice)
We only have one question: Do you really want to know?

The man on screen holds his pose uncomfortably long. Mulder finally changes the channel. Click: the infomercial again.

BLOND MAN
Do you really want to know?

Click: the infomercial.

BLOND MAN
Do you really want to know?

Mulder scans through the channels faster. Click.

BLOND MAN
--really want to know?

Click.

BLOND MAN
--want to know?

Click.

BLOND MAN
--to know?

Click.

BLOND MAN
--know?

Click.

BLOND MAN
--know?

Click: The thin man is replaced by a silent and grainy video of a man and a woman talking. The angle is odd, though, shot from about waist level and looking almost straight up. Disoriented by the odd point of view, it takes Mulder a moment to recognize the two people: himself and Scully, talking in the autopsy room earlier that day, as seen through Larry Johnson's dead eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. SCULLY'S MOTEL ROOM

Scully, in sweats, opens the door to her room. Mulder is outside with his overnight bag.

MULDER
Call me paranoid, but I think it might be a good idea if we didn't stay in separate rooms tonight.

SCULLY
Come on in.

Mulder steps in.

SCULLY
I'll warn you, the TV doesn't work.

MULDER
No problem.

The door SLAMS shut.

INT. SCULLY'S MOTEL ROOM, LATER

The two agents are asleep, Scully in her bed, Mulder in a chair. They are restless--having bad dreams.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR

Mulder and Scully stand together in an elevator, not unlike the one in FBI headquarters. Their stance is awkward and oddly posed: Mulder is smiling, Scully looks annoyed. Treacly elevator MUZAK is playing a familiar but unidentifiable tune.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM

CLOSE UP on Mulder. He is twitching slightly.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR

The elevator stops. The doors open a few inches. We get a glimpse of faintly ROARING blackness on the other side. The treacly music has been replaced by a CALLIOPE playing the same elusively familiar tune.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM

CLOSE UP on Scully. Her face is twisted into a look of pain.

CUT TO:

INT. ELEVATOR

The doors open a little more, revealing more of the abysmal blackness. In the elevator, the agents look at each other apprehensively. A few more inches. The faint roar has become a HOWL. The

agents make a move as if to step through the doors...

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM

The HOWL in the dream becomes the cacophonous RINGING of the phone. Both agents wake with a start and sit bolt upright. The phone RINGS again. Mulder picks it up.

MULDER
Hello?
(no reply)
Hello?

VOICE ON PHONE
Hello? Hello?

Mulder turns his eyes to Scully. The VOICE on the phone is hers, though nearly inaudible behind vague background NOISES. Then the voice changes slightly--a near-perfect imitation of Scully's, but muffled, as though spoken through clenched teeth.

VOICE ON PHONE
Three o'clock. Showtime.

Mulder and Scully look at the motel clock: its green luminescent hands point to three a.m.

VOICE ON PHONE
You don't want to miss it.

The voice fades into HISSES and POPS.

FADE OUT

END OF ACT THREE

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ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. SCULLY'S MOTEL ROOM

Mulder is calling Ricky on Scully's cell phone. After a number of RINGS, the line is PICKED UP by an answering machine. The VOICE on the recording is not Ricky's.

ANSWERING MACHINE (ON THE PHONE)
Hi, kids! We've all gone to the magic show! See you there!

The machine hangs up. Scully comes in, holding a manila envelope.

MULDER
(a bit dazed)
I got his machine.

SCULLY
His machine? Mulder, he didn't even have a phone--how could you get a machine?

MULDER
Any luck with the manager?

SCULLY
He wasn't there.

MULDER
So much for always being at the disposal of his guests.

SCULLY
I found this, though.

She hands Mulder the manila envelope. It is labeled "FOR THE NEWLYWEDS." Mulder removes its contents: a photograph of Mulder and Scully posed together--Mulder smiling, Scully looking annoyed. It is identical to their positions in the elevator dream.

MULDER
Scully, I had this dream--

SCULLY
(interrupting)
Did it have an elevator in it?

Mulder is speechless. From outside, strains of CALLIOPE MUSIC can be heard. The song is familiar, but strangely elusive. The agents step out of the room.

EXT. OASIS MOTEL - NIGHT

The town of Crampton is all but dead but for one building: a few blocks down, the agents can see the Masonic Hall, still every inch a ruin from the outside, is brightly lit within. It is from here that the CALLIOPE MUSIC comes.

INT. MASONIC HALL

Mulder and Scully burst into the hall to find the Spectacular Display of Illusion and Ventriloquism has started without them. No longer a filthy ruin, the inside of the hall seems completely restored,

with intricate ceilingwork, thick-glassed lamps, and a rich, ornate curtain.

The audience is a collection of New York theater first- nighters, carney types, show-business types--all kinds of stereotyped and fraudulent beings. Grinning clowns are working the crowd doing petty sleight-of-hand tricks. The unctuous CALLIOPE MUSIC plays just a little too loud. On stage, a VENTRILOQUIST is performing in an outrageously smarmy manner. On his knee is "Laffo."

Mulder and Scully lurk at the back of the audience. The magician-ventriloquist ends his bit with a shrill TITTER from "Laffo." An unseen EMCEE's VOICE fills the room.

EMCEE (O.S.)
And now, ladies and gentlemen, the moment you've all been waiting for, the centerpiece of our display: The Metamorphosis!

The crowd APPLAUDS. The calliope music disappears and is replaced by treacly MUZAK cranked to distorting. The KID from the Fix-It shop rolls a platform onto the stage: on it, a human FIGURE is tied to a frame, its arms and legs outspread, its head constrained by a band tied around it and a taut cord leading to the top of the frame. The figure is dressed from head to toe in a skeleton suit with an X taped across its mouth.

MULDER

Jesus, Scully, I think that's
Ricky!

Mulder and Scully try to move toward the stage but cannot seem to get any closer--for every person they nudge aside, two seem to move to block their path. They draw their sidearms.

SCULLY
FBI!

MULDER
Federal agents! Get out of the
way!

Strangely, their shouts cannot seem to draw the audience's attention away from "The Metamorphosis," which the trapped agents can only watch in glimpses from between shifting bodies...

On stage, a tuxedoed MAGICIAN with handsome yet forgettable features is rolling the platform from one side of the stage to the other and then twirling it around. Finally it is brought to a dead stop. With a stagey flourish the stage magician tears away the X across the figure's mouth. The skeleton figure emits a continuous tormented SCREAM.

In one swift movement the illusionist tears away the skeleton suit from the neck downward, revealing nothing but empty air underneath. The crowd OOHS, as the cowled head keeps SCREAMING. The illusionist then tears away the hood of the skeleton suit, leaving only a skull dangling from a cord; however, the SCREAMING continues for a few

moments before fading into the ROAR of the jubilant crowd.

The illusionist takes his bows, the music goes TA-DA!, and within moments the hall has emptied.

INT. MASONIC HALL, ON THE STAGE

The curtains draw closed and the house lights go dim just as the agents finally reach the stage. Their guns still drawn, they part the curtain slightly.

On the other side: ROARING blackness.

Mulder and Scully look at each other apprehensively.

SCULLY
Ricky said that he thought he could have turned back here. That he still had a choice.

MULDER
I'm not sure we do.

Mulder steps through the curtain into the ROARING blackness. Scully is right behind him.

CUT TO:

INT. FBI HEADQUARTERS

Mulder and Scully step out of the elevator into chaos: FBI agents and EMS personnel are swarming around the office. Mulder and Scully look a bit

unsteady, as if stepping off a pitching boat onto dry land.

MULDER
(to the nearest agents)
What's going on?

AGENT
You don't want to know.

ANOTHER AGENT
It was Johnson.

MULDER
Larry Johnson?

EMS personnel wheel a gurney past them--on it, Larry Johnson. He is straining at the leather straps that bind him to the stretcher.

AGENT
I think he had a breakdown or something. Just started screaming. I've never heard anybody scream like that before.

Mulder walks over to Johnson's cubicle. The chair is knocked over, papers and office supplies are scattered all over the floor. On the desk is a sheaf of black-and-white photographs. Mulder picks these up for a better look. Obviously overexposed, they depict only yawning blackness.

SCULLY (O.S.)
Did you know him, Mulder?

Looking at the photos, Mulder seems to be trying to remember something.

SCULLY (O.S.)
Mulder?

Whatever it was he was trying to remember, Mulder finally lets it go. He drops the photographs back onto Johnson's desk. They land on a manila envelope; the return address, written in neat, ancient letters: "Crampton, OH."

MULDER
I worked a case with him and his partner. It was a long time ago.

He turns and walks away from the scene.

MULDER
So, seriously, you never saw The Manchurian Candidate?

SCULLY
(following)
Nope.

MULDER
Never?

SCULLY
What did I just say?

MULDER
Jeez, Scully, it's only like the best conspiracy movie of all time.

SCULLY
I thought that was JFK--which you never saw.

MULDER
Yeah, but I know how it ends.

FADE TO BLACK.

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